The Sutras on Dependant Co-arising and Great Emptiness

Dear Sangha,o

Today is the 19th March and we are in the New Hamlet in the spring retreat.

We have studied the Sutra on the Middle Way and at the same time we have looked at the Sutra on Dependent Co-arising and the Sutra on Great Emptiness. The Sutra on Dependent Co-arising is No. 296 in the *Samyukta Agama*. The word "*Samyukta*" is generally understood as "miscellaneous." This word gives us a rather negative first impression, as if items classed as "miscellaneous" were unimportant. The *Samyukta Agama* is, in fact, a collection of sutras which contain the essence of the *Buddhadharma*. If you look deeply into the sutras of the *Samyukta Agama* you will see the source of Buddhism, thus making it even greater than the other *Agamas*, like the *Madhya Agama* or the *Dirgha Agama*. These last two collections have been organised in a special manner; but in the *Samyukta Agama*, presentation is more natural. If you want to get close to the original teachings of the Buddha, examine the *Samyukta Agama*. It is a collection of short sutras containing the essence of the *Buddhadharma*. The Sutra on Dependent Co-arising, The Sutra on the Middle Way, and The Sutra on Great Emptiness are all there in the *Samyukta Agama*.

First, we shall examine the sutra called Causes and Conditions and dependent Co-arising. (Because "causes and conditions", and "interdependence" carry a similar meaning, it is sufficient to call the sutra "Dependent Co-arising.")

The word "Cause" means the seed, the principle cause or condition. "Conditions" here means other necessary conditions, but they may not be the principle conditions. Studying the word as written in Chinese reveals a number of things, one being that there is something very great within a small boundary or square. If something is to become great, it must break through those boundaries. Thus there are four walls enclosing the word "great" in the Chinese character. When you look at a mustard seed, it is small because the other conditions are not there for it to be great. But when the mustard seed is put into the earth and watered, it becomes a great plant. The conditions to bring the mustard seed to fruition are water, earth, fertiliser, and warmth. Notice that the conditions are also causes, but the primary cause, of course, is the seed itself; and the subsidiary causes are the conditions necessary to support the primary cause to develop. Thus, we can translate causes and conditions as interdependent origins or dependent co-arising. "Co" means together; simultaneously; "dependent" means relying on each other. Something cannot arise alone, nothing can stand on its own; everything is dependent upon something else.

We have the word "independence". There are Buddhists who live in America who say that although we celebrate Independence Day, we cannot really live without being dependent on other countries. We should talk about celebrating "Dependence or Interdependence Day." Because one country has to depend on other countries in order to exist.

"Causes and Conditions" and "Interdependent Origins" are terms; "Dependent Co-Arising" is a term. In the Sutra of Great Emptiness and the Sutra on Causes and Conditions, it is said, "This is, because that is." This is the meaning of interdependence. "This arises because that arises". The word "arises' is better than the word "born". This is the definition of the Sutra of Dependent Co-arising and it is repeated many times in the *Agamas*: "This is; therefore, that is." "This is, because that is; this is not, because that is not." "This ceases to be because that ceases to be." "This is like this, because that is like that." That is the definition of co-arising in the sutra and that is the best definition we can give. If we smile, the mirror smiles back at us, because if we are kind, our brothers and sisters will be kind.

In Buddhism there are many theories concerning causes and conditions. There are theories which talk about "four causes and conditions," or twenty, or twenty-two conditions, or twelve causes and conditions; but regardless of the number, "conditions" which are related to each other bring about a result which is existence or co-existence. If those causes and conditions were not related, they could not result in existence. When these conditions are together, connected, or inter-related, we recognise a phenomenon, we have a perception about a phenomenon. The teachings on Dependent Co-arising say that whether a Buddha is or is not present in the world, dependent co-arising remains the basis of everything. This truth, this law is always there in the field of all phenomena. This truth, or law, is always present in all dharma realms.

We are already familiar with the term *dharmadhatu*. It has lying behind it the word, "world." *lokadhatu* in Sanskrit. In Sanskrit the word "world" refers to this world. Within this world you see things that appear to be born and they die, apparently independent of each other. The grapefruit is independent of the lemon. But in the *dharmadhatu*, the lotus is not different from the meditation hall, a man is not different from his brother, all things are interconnected; in the one is the all. All dharmas, all phenomena, dwell in the dharmadhatu. If we can be in touch with them deeply, we can be in touch with their no-birth and no-death nature. The more superficial way of looking is we will be caught in the *lokadhatu* and we will see them being born and dying and not being related to each other. In The Sutra of Co-arising, we should understand that according to the teachings concerning Dependent Co-arising all phenomena dwell in their dharma nature. We have our dharma nature; the flower has its dharma nature. If we can be in touch with that, we are beyond the ideas of being born and dying. If we can be in touch with the dharma nature of the flower, we won't see the flower as something separate from other things. So the idea of phenomena dwelling in the *dharmadhatu* is very important. We can see the essence of the *Mahayana* already in these sutras.

When we come to line 11 we see the words, "these phenomena which are interdependent". When we observe things properly

and do not look at them in an upside-down manner, we can penetrate dependent co-arising. We will realise the teaching of interdependence. Here the word "penetrate" means to become one with the truth of interdependence. If we are in accord with that, one with that, we have exact and absolute understanding, that is called "to witness" and "to penetrate" and "to be in accord with." Then we will know clearly what is meant by the teaching on interdependence. When we have seen that, we are no longer caught in returning to the past to ask, "Was I there in the past? If so, what kind of creature was I? What kind of person was I? What was my form? What was my content? And we are not occupied with the future asking, "In the future will I exist, and if so, what kind of species will I be?" When I return to the present, I will not ask questions about whether or not I exist. Who says, "Do we exist or not? Where did I come from, where will I go?" These are questions we ask when we have no understanding of dependent co-arising. When we have been able to penetrate these teachings, we go beyond these ropes which bind us, like the view of self, the view of sentient beings, and the view of lifespan. Or the view of divination, wanting to divine the future, "How will we be in the future, what is my destiny tomorrow?" When we, in Plum Village, look in to the poem of 'Kieu', to find out our future for the year, what we are doing is asking the ancestral teachers, "How should I practise this year?" We are not trying to divine about the future.

When we have gone beyond these four ideas, we come to situation of the birthlessness of dharmas. Birthlessness means no-birth and no-death. This birthlessness of dharmas, is the dharmadhatu, it is the basis of nirvana. When we practice skilfully we can penetrate the teachings of interdependence. As far as the teachings of interdependence are concerned there is right view, the view of things as they are. This is the skilful view, the skilful understanding, the skilful practice, and the skilful penetration. The practice has to be skilful. It is not necessary to work so hard that we exhaust ourselves in order to realise the way; instead, it is because we have the skills to do that. 'Practicing skilfully' means that our practice needs our intelligence, we have to use our intelligence when we practice.

That is the Sutra on Interdependent Co-arising, and now we will go on to the Sutra on Great Emptiness. The Sutra on Great Emptiness also means interdependent co-arising. Emptiness does not mean non-existence. Emptiness means embracing everything - completely free, not being caught in an idea. *This is what I heard at a time that the Buddha was staying in the Buffalo Herdsmans' Village*, the Buddha said to the bhikkhus, "*I will teach you the Dharma. This Dharma is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, and beautiful at the end, its meaning is good, and its taste is good, it is clear and pure. The life of a monk or nun is clear and bright*". This teaching is called the Great Emptiness Sutra, the *Mahasunyata Sutra*. Bhikkhus, you should listen carefully, and accept this Sutra skilfully.

What is Emptiness? This is because this is not, this arises because that arises. Because of ignorance there is impulses; because of impulses there is consciousness, which results in this great heap of suffering. We notice that the *Six Ayatanas* have been left out. Out of this great mass of suffering arises old age, sickness, and death. Because we are born, we must to grow old and die. If anyone asks: "Who is it that has to grow old and die? This birth, old age, and death, to whom do they belong?" A lack of understanding makes people state, "It is I, myself, who has to grow old and die, this old age and death belong to me, to the self." This is the subject matter of this sutra. When we say old age and death, people ask, "Who is it that grows old? Who is it that dies?" These are not intelligent questions. Living beings are caught in the idea of self. They say we are born, we grow old, we die, and so we are afraid. But if we are able to overcome the idea of self we will not say, "I am the one who was born, I am the one who grows old, I am the one who dies; this birth and death belong to me," if we say this we then take upon ourselves a lot of suffering with no benefit.

According to the teachings of interdependent co-arising, when we understand that everything is caused and conditioned we don't need a self lying in the centre of things like this. When we ask, "Who is born, who grows old, who dies?" It is like when we look at a flower and ask, "Who is opening?" We don't need someone who is a bud, someone who opens, and the flower will still be a bud and open. You don't need an "I" which is born, which will die, and which grows old, why do you need it? Because we say, "If there is birth, there has to be an "I" that is born, if there is ageing, there has to be an "I" that grows old, and if there is death, there has to be someone who will die." In truth, when we master the teaching of dependent co-arising, birth is simply birth; old age is simply old age, death is death; there is no "I" in that. It is only when we are caught in the idea of self that we say there has to be an "I" who is born.

Look at the flower: Has it a soul within it, a self within it? Does it need to have a self in order to be born, in order to open, and in order to fade; does it need an "I" in order to exist? The idea that there has to be an "I" who is the subject to make other things possible is a misconception. The twelve causes and conditions are like that. You don't need a subject going around in the twelve links of dependent co-arising. Dependent co-arising occurs anyway. Rain happens; you don't have to ask, "Who is falling?" For there to be rain, there doesn't have to be an "I." In many languages, it is necessary to say "it" is raining. We have to have a self which is raining. But if there is rain, is there a self in the rain? We get used to this way of speaking, that there has to be a subject, a self, and only then can there be action. In language people have to put in a subject of the word rain, so we have to say, "it rains". In Vietnamese we say the sky is raining, or the weather is raining.

To practice together in order to see this we must be skilful in our practice, in our looking, in our awakening. When we say, "I know the wind is blowing," this sentence can be divided into two phrases. One is "I know," the other, "the wind is blowing." This is truly a funny statement. How can you have wind that doesn't blow? As soon as you have wind, you have blowing; without blowing there is no wind. The blowing is part of the wind. What's the point of saying, "The wind is blowing?" Why not just say, "the wind"? We also have the phrase, "I know." Do we have to have an "I". To just say "know" is enough, we don't need "I."

It's the same when we say, "A cloud is floating in the sky, a flower is opening." If a cloud is not floating in the sky, then it's the water in the river; if a flower is not open, it's not yet a flower, it's a bud. "I know" is the same. "Know" is a verb and our languages state that verbs require subjects, so you have to have the word "I". If we wish to say the truth, just to say "rain" is enough. So, with "I know" you can remove the I, "know" is enough on it's own. Why do you know, when we know we have

to know something, to know that the wind is blowing. "The wind is blowing," is the object of the knowledge. Therefore the object has a subject within it. When you know, you have to know something, so all you have to say is "the wind is blowing", you can get rid of the "know". Or if you like you can just say, "wind". Look into wind and you will see the knower there, because the wind is the object of your knowledge, and if it's wind it must be blowing. So instead of saying, "I know that the wind is blowing", you can just say "wind". In order to save space and time, and in order to be nearer to the truth, all you have to say is "wind", "cloud", "flower", "know". You don't need a subject. The flower needs no self in order to be born; old age doesn't need a self in order to be old age; we have simply become accustomed to the habit of thinking and speaking with a subject, with a self. This has been happening for so many past generations, but, unfortunately, the idea that there must be a subject is something that hides the truth from us.

We know that there are twelve causes and conditions, and they can lead to a great mass of suffering. If we are able to transform these twelve links we will have a lot of freedom and happiness. One of these twelve links is ignorance. Is it necessary to say that ignorance comes before everything else? Do we need to say, "In the beginning there was ignorance?" We know there is no beginning and no end. That is why we say, "We are your disciples since beginningless time." If we say, "In the beginning there was ignorance," we haven't understood anything. It's the same when we walk, sit, touch, eat, there is ignorance in it. All we need is mindfulness, and we will see ignorance in our daily life. Ignorance is a lack of clarity, a lack of looking deeply.

Ignorance brings in its train impulsive action. Impulse means energy, *samskara*. When we misunderstand another sister, that is ignorance which results in irritation and aversion to that sister. Energy is called here *Samskara*, it is an energy which pushes us to do or say something, that is our action. This action lies in our unconscious mind. Can we see that we all have ignorance and impulses in our unconscious mind? Let us consider a glass of water as an example of our consciousness. One drop of black ink in that glass of water, and the water becomes black. That glass of water is our consciousness, and these drops of ink, ignorance, cloud our consciousness. All our jealousy, all our despair, come from this ignorance. These negative emotions are *samskara*; they are impulses that make us suffer and make others suffer. Therefore ignorance leads to impulses *(samskara)*; and *samskara* also leads to ignorance; ignorance and *samskara* give rise to each other. If we sit quietly and look at ourselves we will see ignorance and *samskara* holding hands in us. When we see and acknowledge this, and smile, we will already feel better, we feel that we can intervene at this point, and that is what is meant by practicing. So with a drop of black ink in a glass of water, clarity becomes obscured. When our wisdom is obscured, it can no longer be called wisdom; instead, we must call it consciousness. Consciousness is therefore wisdom which contains a drop of black ink.

Prajna is the glass of clear water without the drop of ink in it, once we have the drop of ink in it, then *prajna* becomes *vijnana*, it becomes consciousness. Impulses give rise to consciousness, and consciousness give rise to impulses. We must see clearly that our conscious mind is holding hands with our *samskaras*. We don't know what they are planning together, but we should find out. Only mindfulness will help us to see what these two are plotting together.

Consciousness arises in two ways: as form (or body), and as mind. In Sanskrit it is *namarupa.* Our aggregates (*skandhas*), our body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, all belong to this field of psyche-soma and they are all a manifestation of consciousness. Consciousness is present in all *skandhas*. Because these *skandhas* contain wrong consciousness, wrong *samskaras*; they are therefore the objects of grasping, and we get caught by them. So they are called the five elements of grasping. In our own person our *skandhas* already contain grasping, because they are the manifestations of consciousness coloured by ignorance. Psyche and soma are Greek terms. Psyche refers to our feelings, our perceptions, and our consciousness; and soma is our body. When we look into psyche and soma, we see consciousness, ignorance, and impulses. In our body, there is ignorance. If this ignorance did not exist in our body, it would not be as it is. It is through ignorance that we eat junk foods, and we live in a certain way; that is why our body is what it is.

So if you look into our feelings you will see the presence of consciousness, of impulses, and of ignorance. And here consciousness means wrong consciousness. So our five aggregates are related to consciousness, the six objects of our senses, and the six organs of sense. Form and psyche-soma gives rise to the six organs of sense, they manifest as our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, each in turn giving us form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and object of mind. When we have these twelve things we have contact, and when we have contact between the six organs and the six objects of sense, we have feeling-pleasant and unpleasant. Because these six organs and objects of sense contain ignorance and impulses, when they come together, because of contact, there is still ignorance, impulses, and attachment. Therefore contact gives rise to feelings, and these feelings are conditioned by ignorance. Sometimes, although we think they are pleasant feelings, they are not, because there is attachment, there is irritation because there is ignorance in our feelings. There are things which are not beautiful, but we say they are. Things which are not pure, we say are pure. Those things which are not self, we say are self; things which are not enemy, we say are enemy. So there is ignorance, and it is seen in the five *skandhas*, the Six *Ayatanas*, contact, and feelings. When feelings contain ignorance, then there is grasping.

Grasping and craving don't manifest only after ignorance. They are present in ignorance from the start. In ignorance there is attachment, jealousy, anger and hatred. This craving, this attachment gives rise to grasping, and grasping makes the roots of craving grow deeper. Once the roots have gone deeper, there is the arising of the life of suffering, attachment, and bondage. The cycle of suffering and bondage then manifests in terms of birth, old age, and death. You can portray the Six Ayatanas, contact, and feeling all together. Sometimes the Buddha talked like that, he said there were only seven causes and conditions, and other times he said there were eight, nine, ten, or twelve. So any number of causes and conditions are correct, it doesn't mean that twelve causes and conditions are more correct than ten causes and conditions. So we can talk about the psyche-soma, but we can also talk about the five *skandhas*. So we have twelve links; ignorance, impulses, consciousness etc, and they're all linked to one another, they all influence each other. For example ignorance is not only the cause of impulses, but impulses are also the cause of ignorance, and ignorance is also the cause of consciousness and psyche-soma. In each one of these eleven there is ignorance, in each of the other eleven links there is *samskara*, and in each the other eleven links there is consciousness. So do not think that the twelve links are in a straight line, one leading on to the next one. If you take a little of your flesh or

your emotion in one moment of your daily life, you will see that all of the twelve links are in that small part you have taken. These twelve causes and conditions lean on each other, are committed to each other and bring about the great mass of suffering. Each one of the twelve links is in relation with the other eleven.

If you don't look practice, if you don't look deeply, you allow this cycle to continue. If you practice, if you light up the lamp of mindfulness, you will say, "that is how it is working. You will say, "let it not work like that anymore, we have suffered enough already." When we bring mindfulness into the picture, this ignorance becomes less dark, and clarity arises. Because we look deeply into the twelve causes and conditions, the darkness of ignorance is released and the light begins to appear. From where does this light come? It comes from the consciousness. Within consciousness is ignorance, but there is also a seed of awakening, and mindfulness. If we bring the seed out of consciousness and light it like a lamp, that light will make the darkness disappear. Very often our suffering, our despair, helps us to awaken. Thus, clarity can come from ignorance. When the lamp is alight the ignorance of our attachment, our despair, will weaken and change. When we have clarity we don't want to pay someone back for what they have done, to make somebody suffer for what they have done to us. We want to do something greater, we want to help our sister who has made us suffer, because we know then that if our sister is happy, we shall be happy. So we have a good aspiration as the cause of our clarity. This clarity gives rise to the *bodhicitta*, or the great aspiration. If you have a great aspiration, have the energy of *bodhicitta* within you, that is because you have seen suffering, you have awakened to the presence of suffering, and you want to put an end to it. That is why you give rise to this great aspiration, this *bodhicitta*, which comes from clarity.

Therefore ignorance brings about *samskaras* which have blindness in them, actions and emotions which contain fear, attachment, hatred, and jealousy. When you have clarity this brings about an energy. That is not blind energy; it is the energy which will bring us to do things which are useful. We can call this energy the energy of *bodhicitta*, or the great aspiration. If ignorance gives rise to *samskara*, clarity gives rise to great aspiration. This great aspiration does not darken the mind; rather it gives rise to wisdom. In consciousness there is ignorance, but in wisdom there is not. Wisdom therefore makes our aspirations stronger and more solid. When the mind is no longer *vijnana* (consciousness), but is *prajna* (wisdom), we want to be there to save beings, we have the great aspiration. The great aspiration gives us the insight that we have to be there for the beings who are suffering in the three realms. So we have something which is equivalent to psyche-soma in order to be present but we don't call it psyche-soma, we call it *nirmanakaya* (transformation body). We are present as all other living beings, but living beings contain so much hatred, so much darkness. Our presence is to bring freshness and happiness like the flower, to be present like flowers. It is called the *nirmanakaya*, and that is the form in which *bodhisattvas* are present. There are the six senses, but this wisdom lays at the basis, while in the first cycle an ordinary person has the six senses, but the six senses are the cause of bondage for that person. As for the *bodhisattva* the six senses are there, but they are the transformation body of the *bodhisattva*; the six senses do not have ignorance in them, they have the great vow in them. The transformation body of the *bodhisattva* is also in contact with the objects of the senses, and there is contact between the sense organs and the object. So here we call the Six *Ayatanas* the subject and object of sense. And there is the contact between subject and object of sense as far as the *bodhisattva* is concerned, because the *bodhisattva* is there in the world in order to be in touch. In that contact between the sense organs and the six objects of sense, there is mindfulness, so there isn't ignorance. When the *bodhisattva's* six organs of sense are in touch with the six objects of sense, there is mindfulness. Mindfulness means there is clarity, there is great aspiration, and wisdom. This contact leads to feeling which also contains mindfulness. (If you have an interest in very concise terminology, please read *The Heart of the Buddha.*)

Of course, where there is mindfulness, there will be pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings. But these feelings do not contain ignorance like the feelings of ordinary beings, instead these feelings contain great aspiration and wisdom. So when there is a painful feeling the *bodhisattva* knows that it is a painful feeling, and that it is really a painful feeling. And when there is a pleasant feeling the bodhisattva knows that it is a pleasant feeling, and that it is really a pleasant feeling. So there is no wrong perception within feelings; they are recognised for what they are. A *bodhisattva* can share the suffering of living beings. When they see someone in great pain, they feel compassion, they suffer, and the *bodhisattva* is nourished by that kind of suffering; it helps to increase their wisdom. Therefore feeling here is feeling with mindfulness. The feelings borne by the *bodhisattva* do not lead to craving. They lead to compassion, and loving kindness. Seeing living things suffer, the *bodhisattva* does not give rise to anger; instead the suffering gives rise to love and the mind of compassion. Living beings suffer and they spread their suffering around them, because they suffer, they crave, and are attached. When the *bodhisattva* feels this suffering he is still free and has compassion and loving-kindness.

Loving kindness and compassion contain clarity. They do not lead to attachment, but to freedom. Because the bodhisattva has compassion and love, he is always able to maintain his freedom, which goes along with clarity and great aspiration. When we lose our clarity and our great aspiration, we lose our freedom at the same time. Therefore, in freedom there is loving-kindness, compassion, and mindfulness. In the feelings of the *bodhisattva* there is also wisdom and freedom. That is why the freedom of the bodhisattva can be maintained fully. If clarity and great aspiration are lost, freedom is lost at the same time.

The substance of the *bodhisattva* is freedom, but if the *bodhisattva* goes into life, it's not because of attachment or bondage. Rather, it is because of the great aspiration. Because of compassion and loving-kindness, the *bodhisattva* goes into the world of birth and death, the world of indifference. Not abandoning the beings who are drowning and drifting in the three worlds. While living beings are drowning and drifting, the *bodhisattva* is going in freedom in the *dharmadhatu*. So being or becoming is the *lokadhatu*, and the equivalent is the *dharmadhatu*. All living beings, including *bodhisattvas*, are in the world, but their way of living is what makes it the *lokadhatu* or the *dharmadhatu*, the pure land or the *saha*-world. So when the *bodhisattva* has established his freedom, the *bodhisattva* goes into the world. We see the *bodhisattva* is with us in the world of birth and death, but the *bodhisattva* has gone beyond that and is dwelling in the world of no birth and no-death in a very natural and peaceful way. The world of no birth and no-death is caused or conditioned by clarity. To see things being born and dying, that is ignorance, but when we see things without birth and death, that is clarity.

Here we have the twelve causes and conditions in two aspects: the first is life and death; the second is liberation and *nirvana*. The cycle of birth and death is that in which ordinary living beings drown and sink because of their ignorance. The other cycle is that in which the *bodhisattvas* realise awakening. We know through these twelve links, we do not need a subject called "I", because if we can penetrate the world of the *dharmadhatu* we do not need a subject, we do not need a self. Therefore the question that is given in this sutra is "Who is it who grows old, who is it who owns old-age?" The answer is, if you still require a subject to go through birth, old age, and death - if you retain the ideas that this is my life span, my self - then you are not yet a real practitioner.

Who is born, grows old, and dies? Life span is this body, or life span is not this body? These questions give rise to so many other questions, but these are philosophical questions. These questions have one meaning although they arise in many different forms. It's just an idea, but when spoken it has many different forms. People who are caught in questions like this, and are occupied by them, are not worthy to be someone practising. If you hear someone say that life-span is one with our body, then that person is not worthy to be called a practitioner. If you say that your life-span is not your body, it's not right either, because all these things are caught in ideas. When a *bodhisattva* is able to penetrate the causes and conditions of the teachings of interdependent arising then, in the twelfth line it says, "our mind will not fall into either of these two extremes". We are not caught in one of these two ideas, that our body is our life-span or our life-span is not our body. We can go directly on the middle way, and we know that the middle way is the way which goes beyond the pairs of opposites. These pairs of opposites are; is/is not, permanence/annihilation, same/different, one/many.

Here we must remember that if you are still occupied with questions like the ones we have examined, "Was I there in the past, what animal, what thing was I in the past, and how was I in the past?" Or in the future, "Will I be there or not, and if I am there what will I be, and what will my form be? Or in the present, "Am I really here, am I really existing, what am I, and where am I going, where have I come from?" Then you have not yet penetrated the teachings of interdependent arising. You are still caught in the four signs of self, living being, life span, and divination. The idea that life span is this body or life span is not this body are two ideas that belong to extreme views. When you fall into such extreme views, you have not been able to penetrate interdependent arising. When we are able to penetrate interdependent arising, we are walking on the Middle Way, and we are not caught in these two pairs of opposites; birth and death, is and is not, permanent and annihilation, the same and different. If our mind is not caught in these two extremes, we go directly onto the Middle Way. When the noble ones come into this life they are able to present reality as it is, not upside down, but in accord with the truth. Here we have reference to right view as we do in The Sutra on the Middle Way.

The Sutra On Great Emptiness also talks about the dharma of no birth, when ignorance has been transformed. When attachment is no longer there, and when the light of wisdom has arisen, we no longer see the subject of birth and death. You do not see birth, old age, and death as belonging to someone. You simply see the ending of birth and death, and you know that the basis of suffering has ended, just like a palm tree from which the top has been cut, it will no longer grow. When the practitioner sees the truth of this, he arrives at the insight of no-birth and no-death. This is 9th line, *"If this ignorance is ended and we can leave behind attachment, then clarity is borne"*. The question, "Who is the one who dies and grows old?" and, "who is the one who owns old age and death?" is no longer a question. Because once old age and death have come to an end, we know that we have uprooted the root of ignorance and attachment. We know we have cut it off at the root, like when we cut the top of the palm tree. In the future we will arrive at the fruit of no-birth, no-death, or nirvana. If ignorance is taken out of attachment, then clarity is born, and these questions will no longer be questions because we have gone beyond this point. Like the palm tree whose top has been removed, it can no longer live. We will be liberated and will realise the teaching of birthlessness and deathlessness. Here, conditioned dependent co-arising is called by a very good name: it is called *mahasunyata*-the great emptiness. Emptiness here means the non-existence of a subject called self as a necessary condition as part of the cycle of causes and conditions.

In conclusion, we may have learnt by heart, we may be able to describe what is meant by dependent co-arising, we may be able to say what is meant by ignorance; we may talk very fluently about the twelve links; but if we are not able to overcome the idea of self, if we are not able to overcome the idea of living being, if we have not been able to overcome the idea of life span, if we continue to be occupied with questions such as, "Who am I?", "Where do I come from?", "Where will I go to?", "What was I like in the past?", "What will I be like in the future?", it means we have not understood the teachings of interdependence, however well we might describe and teach them. Therefore interdependence is given to us as a tool for looking deeply, and we look deeply in our daily lives, living them deeply. So when we cook, wash clothes, or practice walking meditation, we live in such a way that we look deeply into the interdependent nature of all phenomena. We must penetrate in order to become one with the functioning of interdependence. We have to penetrate the flower and see the functioning of the flower, we have to go into the cloud and see the functioning of interdependence in the cloud, and we can realise the great emptiness. Then we can go beyond the idea of self, the sign of self, and at the same time we can go beyond the idea of living being, of life span. We go beyond these ideas and we see we have become one with the teachings of interdependence. At that point we come to understand birthlessness, we can live in the *dharmadhatu* without being carried away by the *lokadhatu*. That is the conclusion. We know that in the sutras of original Buddhism, like the Sutra on the Middle Way, the Sutra on Interdependence, the Sutra on Great Emptiness, we have seen that these sutras contain the essence of the *Mahayana*. We see clearly that the *Mahayana* is the work of the ancestral teachers, to help us see clearly the deeper levels of the original teachings of the Buddha. Which because of a superficial study and practice, we have not been able to discover. The opportunity to study the original teachings of the Buddha through the eyes of the *Mahayana*, is very wonderful.

Next time we will study the sutra on Measuring and Reflecting.